

Comments by Mayor Bob Young
Opening Session of the State AFL-CIO Convention
October 16, 2002

Good Morning.

Welcome to Georgia's second-oldest city, and the state's second-largest city.

We're known for a lot of things – the home of James Brown, Georgia's City of Medicine, the Garden City, home of the U. S. Army Signal School...and the list goes on.

But what we are best known for is a talented and skilled workforce. Some of those workers are among you today.

In Augusta, we are finding that two years into the millennium, our city's working families are struggling.

Jobs are hard to come by. Local jobs are going to out-of-state workers. Our work falls short of a living wage. Benefits have been reduced, or are non-existent.

Our challenge is to keep our workers working here at home.

Though the headlines are dark, I see much in our local economy that encourages me.

In the past three years, unemployment in the City of Augusta has dropped from 6.3 per cent to 5.5 per cent.

The value of new construction in the first nine months of this year has grown about 8 per cent over last year to near 90 million dollars.

And the metro economy remains strong. The value of our goods and services in 2001 was nearly 16 billion dollars, making Augusta the 117th strongest economy among more than 300 metro areas.

We're doing many things right, but there is still much to do.

Last month I created the Mayor's Office for Workforce Development. Under the direction of Kay Allen, the office will play an active role in getting our people into job training programs. And, we'll be a leading advocate for the Earned Income Tax Credit for the working poor.

The City Commission is working on a local preference ordinance to make sure the local tax dollars the government spends stay in the pockets of local workers.

I'll continue to dialog with the local Council of Trades to raise awareness of contractors to the advantages of hiring local people to accomplish the half billion dollars of public works projects the city will put on the street this decade.

And we continue to make progress in other areas of concern to working families – affordable housing, neighborhood development, prescription drug availability for our working poor, and attracting jobs with living wages.

The formula is simple - when Augusta workers win, we all win.

The winning spirit can be found in the mission of the AFL-CIO, which is just as relevant in this city and this state as it is nationally:

to bring social and economic justice to our nation by enabling working people to have a voice on the job, in government, in a changing global economy and in their communities.

I want to thank you for choosing Augusta for your meeting.

And I want to thank you for what you do to support Augusta's working families.